Chapter 1

Revelation in the Age of the Torah

The book of Revelation in the New Testament, which introduces itself as the "*apokalypsis* of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1), was the first work to refer to itself as an apocalypse; indeed, "revelation" derives from the Latin *revelatio*, which is the standard translation for *apokalypsis*. For most people the term "apocalypse" summons up images of the cataclysmic end of the world, images that derive in large part from Revelation. But in Greek the term *apokalypsis* has nothing to do with the end of the world. Its basic meaning is "uncovering," thus, more figuratively, "revelation." The association with eschatology derives not from the meaning of the term but from the content of the book of Revelation and other related works.

In scholarly usage the term "apocalypse" has come to be applied to Jewish and Christian works that share features of form and content with the book of Revelation whether or not the end of the world is their primary interest. Although many of these texts never use the term "apocalypse," they present themselves as revelations to a great hero of the past mediated by an angel. The revelations typically take the form of symbolic visions of history, journeys through the heavens, or some combination of the two. The book of Revelation constitutes an exception to this description because its author writes in his own name, and there are apocalypses that differ from the description in other ways as well, as we shall see. But despite the deviations it is clear that the authors of these works write in consciousness of earlier examples

of the genre. The interests characteristic of the corpus include not only the Last Judgment and cataclysmic end of the world but also reward and punishment after death, the heavenly temple, the divine throne room, and astronomical phenomena and other secrets of nature. The earliest of the apocalypses were written by Jews in the Second Temple period. The form was soon taken up by Christians, and Jews and Christians continued to write apocalypses through the Middle Ages. In the modern era the production of apocalypses has come to an end, but popular interest in them, and particularly in their predictions about the end of the world, continues.

The understanding of apocalyptic literature as defined by eschatological interests may derive from the book of Revelation, but it finds confirmation in the book of Daniel, the only apocalypse included in the Hebrew Bible. Until the mid-1970s Daniel, which scholars date to the time of the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s BCE, was believed to be the first apocalypse ever composed. Because they saw Daniel as the foundational work of the apocalyptic genre, scholars felt justified in treating eschatology as crucial to that genre. But in 1976 Józef Milik published several fragmentary manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that forced a reassessment of this view of the development of the apocalypses. The manuscripts contained portions of the Aramaic originals of most of the works included in 1 Enoch, a collection of five apocalypses attributed to a patriarch mentioned briefly in the book of Genesis (Gen. 5:21–4) that comes down to us in Ethiopic translation. Before the publication of the manuscripts, most scholars dated the earliest of the works collected in 1 Enoch to the middle of the second century BCE, shortly after the composition of Daniel. The manuscripts from the Scrolls make it clear that two of the apocalypses included in 1 Enoch, the Astronomical Book (1 Enoch 72–82) and the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36), pre-date Daniel.

Ancient manuscripts are dated by paleography, examination of the style of writing found in the manuscript and comparison to other manuscripts, ideally including dated manuscripts. It is not an exact science, and while experts usually agree on relative dates – which manuscript is earlier and which later – they often

differ by half a century or more on specific dates. Milik dated the earliest manuscript of the Astronomical Book to the late third or early second century BCE, and there is no reason to believe that the manuscript is the original of the work it preserves. He placed the earliest manuscript of the Book of the Watchers in the first half of the second century BCE, but argued that the peculiarities of the manuscript suggest that it was copied from a significantly earlier manuscript. Thus Milik believed he could demonstrate that the Astronomical Book should be dated to the third century BCE, making it the most ancient part of 1 Enoch and also the most ancient apocalypse, while the Book of the Watchers, though somewhat later, was probably composed in the late third century and certainly no later than the early second century BCE.

Despite the subjectivity of some Milik's judgments about the manuscripts, there has been widespread scholarly acceptance of his dating of both early Enochic works, and the new dates have had a profound impact on the study of apocalyptic literature. Neither the Astronomical Book nor the Book of the Watchers is particularly interested in eschatology. The Astronomical Book focuses almost exclusively on the courses of the sun and moon and their calendrical implications, while the Book of the Watchers touches on the Last Judgment but devotes more attention to other interests such as the heavenly temple and the secrets of nature and the cosmos. While no later apocalypse shares the narrowly focused interests of the Astronomical Book, the interests of the Book of the Watchers recur in many later apocalypses. Yet until the new dates were established, scholars generally took the interests of the Book of the Watchers as idiosyncratic and marginal in comparison to the interests of Daniel and Revelation.

In the same year that Milik published the Enoch fragments from the Scrolls, Robert Kraft delivered a programmatic paper entitled "The Pseudepigrapha in Christianity" to a scholarly conference The "pseudepigrapha," falsely attributed writings, of Kraft's title were the so-called Old Testament pseudepigrapha, works attributed to heroes of the Hebrew Bible that were not included in the Jewish or Christian canon. Kraft's paper called into question what had been the standard procedure in the study of these texts, the excision of obviously Christian elements on the

assumption that they were interpolations. Kraft argued that this mode of operation, intended to retrieve the presumed Jewish originals of the works, failed to take into consideration the well-attested interest among ancient and medieval Christians in heroes of the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish tradition. Furthermore, the determination of what constitutes a Christian addition or alteration is inevitably extremely subjective, and the assumption that the impact of Christian transmitters is confined to additions that can be surgically removed is deeply problematic. Kraft called on scholars to take seriously the form of the text that reaches us and to make the context in which a text is preserved the starting point for exploring the context in which it was composed. The work of the Dutch scholar Marinus de Jonge on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in the years shortly before Kraft's paper provided an example of the kind of work Kraft called for. De Jonge argued that the Testaments was not, as previous scholarship had assumed, a Jewish work with many Christian interpolations but rather a Christian composition that made use of Jewish traditions. In later publications de Jonge sought to show how the Testaments fit into the second-century Christian environment in which he believed it was composed.

Kraft's program has important implications for the study of the apocalypses, for, with the exception of the book of Daniel and fragments of several Enochic works preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature reaches us through Christian channels. The Apocalypse of Abraham, which survives only in Slavonic, is a good example of the kind of apocalypse Kraft's prescriptions apply to. There has been considerable progress in the study of the Slavonic pseudepigrapha in recent years because the end of Communism in eastern Europe has permitted more scholars expert in Slavonic to devote themselves to the study of ancient Judaism and Christianity. Still, basic questions remain unanswered. The manuscripts in which the Apocalypse of Abraham is preserved date from the fourteenth century or later. While its original language may have been Hebrew, it was probably translated into Slavonic from Greek; thus the Slavonic may well be a translation of a translation. Not surprisingly given so many centuries of transmission by Christians, it contains elements

that appear to be Christian, although there is no unanimity about what those elements are. Following Kraft's advice, a student of the Apocalypse of Abraham would start not by attempting to remove Christian features of the work but rather by asking what role the work played in Slavonic culture in the fourteenth century. For example, he might explore why so many of the apocalypses preserved in Slavonic – 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch, and the Ascension of Isaiah, in addition to the Apocalypse of Abraham – involve ascent to heaven. A better sense of the cultural setting in which the work is preserved also allows us to see if there are significant aspects of the work that do not fit well in that setting, thus pointing to origin in a different milieu. In the chapters that follow, as I examine the place of the apocalypses in early Judaism and Christianity, I will allude only occasionally to the complexities just discussed. Still, it is important to remember that for several of the apocalypses under discussion there is no clear evidence to connect them to the centuries around the turn of the era but only a series of assumptions and arguments, many of which may well be wrong.

Before offering a brief guide to the contents of this book, let me admit its limitations. My focus in this book is on apocalypses, works that belong to a particular literary genre, rather than on apocalyptic ideas more generally, though many such ideas will enter the discussion. Nor have I set out to offer a complete survey of apocalyptic literature. To begin with, I restrict myself to Jewish and Christian works. I do not discuss prophecies of the defeat of foreign invaders from Hellenistic Egypt or journeys to Hades or other extraterrestrial realms from Greek and Latin literature. I do not consider Middle Persian texts that parallel the apocalypses or Muslim adaptations of the genre. Furthermore, though the corpus of Jewish and Christian apocalypses from the formative period for the genre, the third century BCE through the second century CE, is quite small, consisting of perhaps fifteen works depending on the criteria used to determine inclusion, I do not treat them all. I am even more selective in regard to apocalypses and related works from late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Rather than attempting to touch briefly on all the relevant works, I haven chosen instead to focus on themes that seem to me particularly important and to trace their development over the centuries.

In the second portion of this chapter I offer a sketch of Judaism in the early Second Temple period, focusing on the developments most relevant to the apocalypses. Chapter 2 treats the Book of the Watchers. As already noted, the Book of the Watchers is not concerned primarily with eschatology. It is more interested in knowledge about heaven, the angels, and the natural world revealed to Enoch in the course of an ascent to the heavenly temple and a journey to the ends of the earth. The account of Enoch's ascent is the first such account in ancient Jewish literature, and it has a powerful influence on later apocalypses. Chapter 3 turns to the book of Daniel with its visions of the imminent end of history. I place the formal features of vision and interpretation in their historical and literary context and examine the work's eschatological timetables and the figure of the one like a son of man. Chapter 4 looks at the development of these elements – vision and interpretation, eschatological timetables, and the figure of the one like a son of man – in early Jewish and Christian apocalypses that follow Daniel during the Roman period. The chapter focuses particularly on 4 Ezra, written in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, with attention to several other works including the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37–71), 2 Baruch, and the book of Revelation. Chapter 5 follows the development of apocalypses in which ascent to heaven plays a central role in the Roman era, including the Parables of Enoch, 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, Revelation, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, the Ascension of Isaiah, and 3 Baruch. It analyzes the picture of heaven as temple in these works, the relationship between the visionary and the angels, the fate of the righteous dead, and the attitude toward the secrets of nature revealed to the visionary.

Chapters 6 and 7 move out of the Second Temple and early Christian period into late antiquity. Chapter 6 is concerned with two bodies of literature that are deeply indebted to the more ancient ascent apocalypses, tours of hell and paradise that continued to flourish in the Christian Middle Ages, leaving their mark on Dante, and the hekhalot texts, early Jewish mystical works that describe the ascent of the visionary to stand before the divine throne. Chapter 7 considers the fate of apocalypses focused on the end of history among Jews and Christians in the Byzantine

era before and after the Muslim conquest. Especially in the Christian works the influence of the book of Daniel continues to be powerful. Chapter 8 turns to echoes of the apocalyptic tradition in the modern era. Few apocalypses have been written since the dawn of modernity, but movements motivated by an apocalyptic reading of history, often by the book of Daniel itself, played an important role in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period among both Jews and Christians. Nor have such movements disappeared in the intervening centuries. After a brief consideration of a number of such movements, the chapter focuses on the Branch Davidians, a small movement deeply indebted to the book of Daniel that attracted considerable attention because of its disastrous confrontation with American law enforcement in Waco, Texas, in 1993. The book concludes with some brief reflections on the central themes of apocalyptic literature from its beginnings to the present.

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The ancient Israelites established two kingdoms. Israel, the northern kingdom, which was larger and more powerful than Judah in the south, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Judah lasted a century and a half longer. But in the summer of 586 BCE the Babylonian army that had been laying siege to Jerusalem, Judah's capital, finally entered the city. The soldiers tore down the wall that protected the city and set fire to its major buildings including the Temple of the Lord, the holiest spot in the holy city. Most of the population of Jerusalem was taken off to exile in Babylonia, with only some of the poor permitted to remain in the ruined city. The king of Judah fled the city with some of his men, but he was captured by the Babylonians and made to watch the execution of his sons. Then his captors blinded him and brought him in fetters to Babylon. Thus the failed rebellion brought to an end the two institutions that had stood at the center of the life of the kingdom of Judah for 400 years, the house of David, the dynasty descended from Israel's founding king, and the Temple, the house of the Lord, in which the divine presence was believed to dwell.

In response to these devastating losses some of the Judean exiles gave up on their God, concluding that he was either too weak to protect them or too angry. But others accepted the message

that the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had been preaching both before and after the fall of Jerusalem. For them the destruction of the Temple and the deposition of the Davidic king did not mean that God had abandoned his people. Nor were these disasters a sign that the gods of the Babylonians were stronger than the God of Israel. Instead they saw the disasters as the work of the God of Israel himself, the only god, who was punishing his people for idolatry and other sins. Yet, the prophets promised, God would eventually restore the exiles to their land and favor them with peace and prosperity. Jeremiah even put a limit on the length of the exile: after seventy years, the Lord would restore his people to its land.

The opportunity to return to Judah came even sooner than Jeremiah had predicted. By 539 the once mighty Babylonian empire was in decline, threatened by the advance of a new power, Persia. As the Persian king Cyrus marched on Babylon, the anonymous prophet known as Second Isaiah prophesied his success. Cyrus was the Lord's agent for the liberation of the Judeans, though as the prophet had to confess, the great conqueror did not recognize the god who had singled him out for this task. The prophet was not disappointed in his hopes. Upon taking power in Babylon Cyrus issued a decree in 538 permitting the Judean exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple. Scholars understand Cyrus' gracious behavior toward the exiles as part of a larger Persian policy intended to gain the support of subject peoples. But the prophet did not doubt that Cyrus was inaugurating a new era in which Judah's relationship to the Lord would be repaired and her people would enjoy a more glorious state than ever before.

Despite this prophetic encouragement, many of the offspring of the exiled Judeans were not enthusiastic about the prospect of leaving Babylonia, where they had been born, for a land they had never known, and few chose to return. The initial attempts to resettle the region of Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple did not go well, and it was not until about 520, with the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urging them on, that the returnees finally began the work of rebuilding in earnest. The new Temple was dedicated in 515, almost exactly seventy years after the first had been

destroyed, investing Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of punishment with great prestige, as we shall see when we turn to the book of Daniel.

But if one pillar of pre-destruction Judah had been restored, the other had not. The Judeans had exchanged one kind of foreign rule for another, and though the Persians were in many ways more generous than the Babylonians, they were not so generous as to restore kingship to the Judeans. It is true that the first governors the Persians appointed for Yehud, as they called the province around Jerusalem, were descendants of David. But while all the Persian governors of Yehud whose names are known to us were Jews, after those first few none is identifiable as a descendant of David. Perhaps the Persians concluded that it was dangerous to encourage the hopes that rule by a Davidide might raise, even if the Davidide held his office at the pleasure of the Persian government. Thus, by the turn of the sixth to the fifth century it had become clear that the restoration over which the Persians presided was to be only partial: a new Temple replaced the house of the Lord that the Babylonians had destroyed and priests could once again offer sacrifices there, but there was no king descended from David sitting on the throne.

But before the end of the monarchy there had emerged the forerunner of a new institution that would stand alongside the Temple during the Second Temple period: the Torah, the five books of Moses, an authoritative written text containing the founding legends of the Jewish people and the laws by which they were to live to maintain their covenant with the Lord. The traditions contained in the first four books of the Torah had been developed and transmitted orally for centuries. But by the last decades of the seventh century writing was becoming increasingly important in Judah, as can be seen from the books of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and in 622 BCE King Josiah read to the assembled people the words of a book calling itself the Torah, teaching, of Moses, that had purportedly been found in the Temple. This book was Deuteronomy, or an early form of it, which now serves as the fifth book of the Torah. It is hard to overstate the importance of this development for the shape of Judaism, in antiquity or today.

The book of Deuteronomy laid out a program of cultic reform. By restricting the sacrificial cult to the Jerusalem Temple and destroying the high places, local cult sites that were difficult for the royal establishment to supervise, the reformers hoped to eliminate the worship of any god or goddess except the Lord. Yet according to Deuteronomy this reform is not an innovation but rather the fulfillment of what Moses had ordained while the Israelites were still traveling through the wilderness. Like the apocalypses' attribution of their revelations to great heroes of the Bible, the attribution to Moses lent authority to the reform.

Josiah's sponsorship of Deuteronomy is remarkable because, in addition to placing the cult under the king's control, it also places significant limits on royal power: he is not to have too many horses or wives or riches. Further,

> When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law … and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God … that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (Deut. 17:18–20)

It is clear from the Bible's narratives about the prophet Nathan's rebuke of King David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, and Elijah's condemnation of Ahab for the appropriation of Naboth's vineyard, that the power of kings in ancient Israel was by no means absolute; it was understood that kings, like their subjects, were bound by the terms of the covenant with the Lord. Deuteronomy takes that understanding a significant step forward by laying out the limits of royal power explicitly and in writing.

Deuteronomy's ability to rein in unwilling monarchs was never really tested. Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians in 609, and less than twenty-five years later the kingdom of Judah came to an end at the hands of the Babylonians. Though it viewed Josiah as the best king ever, the book of Kings does not think highly of his successors, whom it accuses of doing evil in the sight

of Lord as their fathers had done, but it tells us far too little to allow us to draw any conclusions about their attitude toward Deuteronomy.

The earliest definitive evidence for the Torah as we know it with its five books is the Greek translation made sometime during the third century BCE. But it seems likely that the five-book Torah took shape during the Babylonian exile and the period that followed. We know that in the middle of the fifth century in Jerusalem, less than a century after Cyrus' decree, there was a public reading of "the book of the Torah of Moses," which was probably close to the Torah we know today. Its public reading served the same function that the public reading of Deuteronomy had served almost two centuries before, to establish the book being read as an authoritative text.

But while Deuteronomy enjoyed the patronage of a Davidic king, Ezra's Torah was backed by the Persians. For Ezra, described in the Bible as "a scribe skilled in the Torah of Moses" and a priest, was also a Persian civil servant, and he had come to Jerusalem as the emissary of the Persian crown. In other words, the emergence of the Torah as a central Jewish institution in the period after the exile took place at the initiative of the foreign ruler. Because the Persians granted considerable internal autonomy to their subject peoples, they needed clarity about the laws of those peoples. Thus they required civil servants such as Ezra, experts in the laws of a subject people, and they appear to have supported Ezra's attempt to elicit communal acknowledgment of the authority of the Torah. It appears that they were less enthusiastic about the trouble Ezra caused as a result of his effort to enforce a prohibition on marriage between men from the community of returnees and local women that he understood as the mandate of the Torah, though much of the community would have disagreed. Ezra's unexplained disappearance from the scene in the biblical account may suggest that his Persian bosses, who had sent him to stabilize the community, were not happy with the turmoil he caused with his attempt to send away wives he viewed as foreign along with their children. Nonetheless the Persians do not appear to have blamed the Torah itself, which remained the established law of the Jewish people throughout the Persian period and beyond.

From the time of Ezra, then, two institutions stood at the center of Judaism, the Temple and the Torah. The institutions were intertwined with each other. Much of the Torah is devoted to the laws of sacrifice and other rituals that take place in the Temple. Furthermore, as the figure of Ezra demonstrates, there was considerable overlap between the officials responsible for the two institutions; though priesthood was a hereditary status in ancient Israel, priests are prominent among the Torah experts of the Second Temple period whose names and ancestry are known to us.

But the two institutions also stood in a certain tension with each other, as the career of Nehemiah demonstrates. Nehemiah was a highly placed Jewish courtier who played on his friendship with the Persian king to arrange for his own appointment as governor of Yehud. He arrived in Jerusalem in this capacity shortly after Ezra's visit. Unlike Ezra, he was not a priest, but he was far more effective than Ezra in accomplishing his goals. He succeeded both in fortifying Jerusalem and in imposing a number of reforms of communal life. Upon returning to Jerusalem from a visit to the Persian capital, Nehemiah reports, he discovered that the high priest Eliashib had given Tobiah the Ammonite use of a room in the Temple. Though Tobiah was a friend of Eliashib, he was a long-standing enemy of Nehemiah, and Nehemiah did not hesitate to throw him out of the space Eliashib had given him. As the governor of Yehud, with the power of the state behind him, Nehemiah could do as he wished. Nonetheless in his memoir he chose to justify his actions by appealing to the Torah of Moses: "On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God" (Neh. 13:1). The meaning of the passage to which Nehemiah alludes, Deuteronomy 23:3, is not crystal clear, but it appears to prohibit the offspring of marriages between Israelites and Ammonites from participating in the Israelite cult until the tenth generation. Nehemiah, however, reads the prohibition as demanding the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites from the Temple building.

Eliashib's response to Nehemiah's attack has not come down to us, but he surely could have claimed that the Temple was his

domain and that Nehemiah had no business meddling. As the high priest, he knew far better than Nehemiah, a layman, what was permitted in that domain and what was not, for he was heir to priestly tradition learned at the knee of his father and his grandfather. If it were not for the written text, Eliashib would surely have had the better of the argument, though Nehemiah with his governor's power could still have done as he wished. But the written text, read aloud for all to hear, allowed Nehemiah to trump Eliashib's claims based on the ancestral traditions of the priesthood in the name of preserving the holiness of the Temple. Thus, on the one hand the Torah provided a warrant for the Temple and its cult, but on the other hand it left the Temple and its officials vulnerable to criticism for failing to fulfill their duties. That criticism was especially likely to come from those learned in the Torah, though many scribes, like Ezra, were also priests by ancestry. We shall see that criticism of the priests and the way they run the Temple is an important theme of some apocalypses, but, as with Nehemiah's criticism, this later criticism of the cult grows out of the desire to see the highest standards maintained for priesthood and Temple.

Prophecy did not disappear with the destruction of the First Temple. Indeed, as we have seen, there were prophets who comforted the exiled Israelites in Babylonia while other prophets played an important role in encouraging the community of the return to complete the building of the new Temple. Nonetheless the authoritative status of the written text of the Torah made prophecy less important. Now that the Torah was publicly available, it did not take a prophet to discern God's will. Instead textual interpretation became increasingly central. It is significant that the prophecies of Zechariah from the time of the building of the Second Temple take the form not of the direct speech of the Lord typical of prophecy before the destruction but of visions to be deciphered by an angel. As we shall see, the apocalypses develop still further the idea of prophecy as interpretation.

In 333 Alexander of Macedon began the campaigns that made him ruler of lands from Greece to India by bringing an end to the Persian empire; by 332 Yehud was under his control. With Alexander's death in 323, his vast empire was divided among his

generals. By the beginning of the third century BCE Judea, as it was now known, had fallen to the lot of Ptolemy, whose realm was centered in Egypt, and it remained under the rule of his descendants until 200 BCE, when Antiochus III, a descendant of Alexander's general Seleucus, wrested it from them. The arrival of Alexander and the Greeks brought some important changes to the Jews, including intensified contact with Greek culture. But the autonomy the Jews had enjoyed under the Persians remained largely in tact under Ptolemaic rule and the first decades of Seleucid rule. Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote at the end of the first century CE, tells us that when Alexander passed through Jerusalem on his way to Egypt, he confirmed the right of the Jews to live by their "ancestral laws" (*Jewish Antiquities* 11.329–38). Other aspects of Josephus' account, such as Alexander's report that he recognized the high priest as the man who had appeared to him in a dream encouraging him as he began on his course of conquest, are likely Jewish wishful thinking, but there is no reason to doubt that Alexander planned to continue Persian policy toward the internal affairs of the Jews. The policy appears to have continued under Ptolemy I, who gained control of Judea around 300 BCE, though his successors, in keeping with their effort at centralization, may not have granted official recognition of Judean autonomy or of the political role of the high priests. Yet if observance of the laws of the Torah then became voluntary, there is no indication that the Torah suddenly lost its authority nor the high priests their prestige. When the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III conquered Judea in 200 BCE, he confirmed again the right of the Jews to live by their ancestral laws.